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The Master's Birthday

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Birthday.

Eldridge Entertainment House
Franklin, Ohio.

The Master's Birthday.

A Play for Children

In Three Acts. With an Epilogue in Pantomime.

By H. REA WOODMAN

Author of "The Sweet Girl Graduates,"
"The Professor," and "His Uncle John."

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Dedication

To my little nephew, Benjamin Woodman Manier, who abides, secure and supreme, 'in my heart of hearts.'

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"Like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favorite child. And his name is David Copperfield."

Preface to "David Copperfield."

The motive of this little play is found in the eleventh chapter of "The Personal History of David Copperfield," the purest bit of autobiography in all the length of that exquisite self revelation. It would be well for the elders to read the chapter before they coach the children for "The Master's Birthday."

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

David Copperfield
Tommy Traddles
Oliver Twist
'Pip'
Little Nell
Florence Dombey
Agnes Wickfield
Little Em'ly
The Marchioness.

The Dominie of Greenfields Schoolhouse.

ACT 1. The Letter. Wednesday afternoon, June 7, 1871.
ACT 2. The Party. Friday afternoon, June 9, 1871.
ACT 3. The Dominie's Story. The same day.
Epilogue. For the Master.

(*Wednesday afternoon, June 7th,* 1871. *Hamstead Heath, an open place, with only a few gnarled tree stumps around, near the city of London. Enter David Copperfield in haste*).

David: It's funny Tommy Traddles isn't here. (*pauses to take several breaths*) He said he'd come right after dinner. If he doesn't hurry we won't have time to write everybody. (*sits down upon a tree stump, and takes off his hat*) I hope Steerforth hasn't been here.

(*Enter Little Nell, as if looking for some one.*)

Nell: (*not seeing David*) I cannot find Grandfather. I've looked and looked for him and I'm very tired. Oh what if I'm lost! (*sees David and looks at him in silence.*)

David: (*after eying Little Nell a minute in serious silence*) If you know where you are, you aren't lost.

Nell: This is Hamstead Heath, isn't it?

David: Yes, this is Hamstead Heath. (*There is a silence, the children regarding each other gravely*) What is your name?

Nell: (*looking away off, anxiously*) My name is Nell. Grandfather cannot have gone far, do you think?

David: Nell what?

Nell: Just Little Nell. (*sits down on a tree stump*) I'm very tired.

David: What is the rest of your name? Everybody has two names. Steerforth has two names, and so has Traddles, and so have I. You *must* have another name.

Nell: (*shaking her head*) I am "Little Nell." That's what Grandfather calls me.

David: (*quickly*) Do you live with your Grandfather?

Nell: Yes.

David: (*eagerly*) In the Old Curiosity Shop?

Nell: Yes. In the Old Curiosity Shop.

David: Then you are Charles Dickens's * Little Nell. Why didn't you say so? Well, I am glad I met you today.

Nell: What is your name?

David: David Copperfield.

* To be pronounced throughout the play in four syllables.

Nell: (*opening her eyes very wide*) Charles Dickens's David Copperfield?

David: (*proudly*) Yes, I am that David Copperfield, and I tell you I am glad that I met you.

Nell: Why, do you know where Grandfather is?

David: No, but I want to invite you to a party.

Nell: A party? Invite *me* to a party? Whose party?

David: (*with much importance*) Yes, to a party we are getting up for Charles Dickens,—The Master, you know. All his children are going to give him a party on his birthday.

Nell: They *are?* Can I come? Oh please let me come!

David: Of course you are to come. I am inviting you now. Tommy named you; you are on his list.

Nell: Oh, I am so glad I am to come! Grandfather will be glad. (*suddenly, in quite another tone*) Can Grandfather come?

David: No, it's only Charles Dickens's children, but he won't mind when you tell him how it is.

Nell: No, he won't, and I think he will let me come. Who is getting it up? Will Florence and Paul be there? And Kit?

David: (*nodding*) *All* Charles Dickens's children, —every single one we can find.

Nell: Oh, isn't it lovely?

David: Yes, it's fine. Steerforth thought of it, you know. And everybody is to bring something good to eat, 'cause they always have refreshments at a party.

Nell: (*sadly*) I can't bring anything if—if—unless I find Grandfather.

(*Enter Oliver Twist, in poor clothes.*)

David: Hello, Oliver Twist! Have you seen Steerforth?

Oliver: No, I came to look for Little Nell. (*to Nell*) Your Grandfather is looking for you. He's by that oak tree—you know that big tree by the well, on the right of the road?

Nell: Yes, is Gradfather there?

Oliver: Yes, and he told me to tell you to come.

Nell: (*rising*) What is he doing?

Oliver: He's just resting and waiting for you.

Nell: Oh, Oliver Twist, there's going to be such a beautiful party!

Oliver: A party?

David: Yes, and you are to be sure and come.

Oliver: (*looking wondering from one to the other*) What party? Am I to be invited to a party?

Nell: We are all invited. David is getting it up.

David: But Steerforth is helping me. You know he always thinks of such *grand* things to do!

Oliver: I have never been to a *real* party.

Nell: Neither have I. But this is a real party.

David: Yes, this is a real party; we are going to have invitations and refreshments—and—and everything they have at a *real* party.

Oliver: (*looking down at his clothes*) My clothes are not good enough for a party.

Nell: (*laying her hand on Oliver's shoulder*) But it is not a dress-up party, is it, David?

David: No, it is a birthday party,—a party where everybody comes because they love the one whose birthday it is.

Oliver: (*still looking down at his clothes*) Whose birthday is it?

David: Charles Dickens's.

Oliver: (*looking up quickly*) Oh, The Master's birthday?

David: Yes, we are getting up a party for him. But don't tell. It's a surprise.

Oliver: Then I can go in these clothes. He knows my mother is dead.

Nell: (*looking down at her own clothes*) I don't think The Master cares much about clothes anyway. He knows they do not really matter. I must go to Grandfather, or he'll think I'm not coming. Where is the party, David? You haven't told us yet.

David: (*pointing*) Down that way. In Greenfields Schoolhouse.

Oliver: Yes, I know; I've been past there often.

Nell: Grandfather will know where it is.

David: Come Friday afternoon at 2 o'clock, and bring some—some refreshments.

Oliver: (*in dismay*) Does everybody have to bring some refreshments?

Nell: I'll bring some for you, Oliver.

Oliver: (*anxiously, to David*) Will it be all right if Little Nell brings some for me?

David: Yes. Besides, boys do not have to bring any refreshments. That is for girls, you know.

Oliver: Oh, it is.

Nell: (*starts to go*) Grandfather will be worried if I don't come.

Oliver: I'll show you where he is, Little Nell. It's this way. (*they go out*)

David: (*springing up, and calling after them*) When Little Nell is all right, you come

back, Oliver Twist. We want you to 'stribute invitations.

Oliver: (*from outside*) I'll be right back.

David: (*looking in the other direction from the one the children have taken*) I think yonder comes Tommy Traddles. (*watches a minute in very evident suspense*) Yes, sir, it's Tommy! (*calls*) Hello, Tommy!

(*Enter Tommy Tradles, in blue clothes, very tight-fitting.*)

Tommy: How long have you been here?

David: Where is Steerforth? Did you bring the letter? Have you seen Ham?

Tommy: (*breathing hard*) My, I ran 'most of the way up the hill! Steerforth can't come just now. He's out walking with Miss Creakle.

David: Well, he'll come as soon as he can. Where is Ham Peggotty?

Tommy: I can't find him. Missis Gummidge thinks he must be fishing with Mr. Peggotty. Little Em'ly can come. I told her and Missis Gummidge said she could.

David: Did you tell her about the refreshments? (*sits down on the tree stump again.*)

Tommy: (*taking off his hat, and sitting down on another stump close by*) Yes.

David: And where the party is to be?

Tommy: Yes, Missis Gummidge wrote it all down. (*he picks up a long stick and marks idly in the sand.*)

David: (*pointing after Little Nell and Oliver Twist*) Look going there.

Tommy: (*looking*) Who is it?

David: Little Nell and Oliver Twist. He is coming back to help 'stribute invitations.

Tommy: (*marking in the sand*) Everybody will come, I think. I told Pip and Tom Gradgrind.

Tavid: I don't suppose Tom can come?

Tommy: He will come if he can run off. He doesn't durst ask his father. Who's going to invite Agnes?

David: I'll tell her. And say, Tommy, I don't want to invite Uriah Heep.

Tommy: (*thoughtfully, marking on the ground*) We ought to, though.

David: (*slowly*) Do you really think we ought to, Tommy?

Tommy: (*not looking up*) He's one of Charles Dickens's children, isn't he?

David: (*watching Tommy's marking very closely*) Yes, but—but I don't think he loves him very much.

Tommy: (*looking up at last*) I don't like him, and you don't like him, and Agnes doesn't like him, but we can't tell how The Master feels about him. Did he ever tell you he didn't like Uriah Heep?

David: (*dejectedly*) No, of course not. (*There is a silence, Tommy marking on the ground, David watching him.*)

Tommy: (*looking up at last*) I tell you what, David. You ask Agnes what she thinks about it. She'll know what we'd better do.

David: (*brightening up*) Yes, she will. And if she says invite him, we will. Well, who else?

Tommy: (*taking a crumped paper out of his pocket and consulting it*) There's Tiny Tim, and Paul and Florence Dombey, and the Jellebys.

David: We ought to ask the Micawber children—only not the twins, of course. They're too little.

Tommy: (*writing laborously, the paper on his knee*) Yes, and the Micawber children. And Joe, the Fat Boy.

David: I hope he'll eat a good dinner before he comes. Have you put down the little Kenwigses? But only Morleena'll come.

Tommy: (*writing*) The Kenwigses. And oh, yes, Sissy Jupe!

David: And tell her to bring Merrylegs. Invite Merrylegs 'special, hadn't we?

Tommy: (*writing very rapidly*) Don't go so fast. There are a good many. It will be a big party.

David: I am so afraid we'll forget some of them. Now think, Tommy. Think *hard*.

Tommy: (*earnestly*) I cannot thing of anybody else —not a single one.

David: Neither can I. Oh, yes, there's "Mealy Potatoes."

Tommy: (*straightening up*) Who's "Mealy Potatoes?"

David: (*looking straight ahead, and speaking slowly*) A boy I used to work with at Murdstone and Quinby's. His father's a waterman. He's a very ignorant boy, but—but he ought to be invited, I think.

Tommy: (*after consideration*) Do you think he'd care if he wasn't?

David: (*still looking straight ahead*) I don't know, but he is one of Charles Dickens's children.

Tommy: Well, then, invite him. (*writes*) "Mealy Potatoes." It's a queer name.

David: (*gravely*) Yes, it's a queer name. And there's Smike, but I guess Squeers wouldn't let him come. Let's not tell Smike; it would only make him feel bad. And besides, Squeers might beat him if he knew.

Tommy: No, it's no use to tell Smike; he'd only get thrashed for it. How about the Marchioness?

David: Oh yes, the poor little Marchioness! Do you suppose she *could* come?

Tommy: I'll tell Dick Swiveller to *make* Sally Brass let her come.

David: Well, you see Dick Swiveller, but tell him not to tell. Tell him it is most particular,

but do not say it is a surprise party. Don't forget. The Master wouldn't think it was a nice party without the Marchioness.

Tommy: If we tell Dick Swiveller, he'll see that she gets to come. *He* isn't afraid of the Brasses.

David: You won't forget? And don't tell him it is a surprise. Did you bring the letter?

Tommy: (*taking a white envelope, much wrapped up, from his jacket pocket*) Here it is. (*unwraps it carefully*) Steerforth copied it for me.

David: Then it is all right, I know. Go on, Tommy, read it.

Tommy: (*gets up from the stump, takes a few steps, and stands very straight*) See if it sounds all right. (*reads aloud with much pride.*)

London, June 6th, 1871.

Charles Dickens, Esquire,
Gadshill, in Kent.

Dear Master: We, the undersigned, acting as a committee for your loving and obedient children, respectfully ask you to meet us on particular and pressing business at Greenfields Schoolhouse Friday afternoon, at 3 o'clock, p. m. Please, honored Sir, do not—do not—Please, honored Sir, do not—I don't know what this word is. There is a blot here. It looks like "hail," or "whale."

David: (*getting up and taking the letter*) It cannot be "whale." Where is it? Oh, I see. (*reads slowly*) "Please, honored Sir, do not—do not—F-A—, it's 'fail,' Tommy. 'Do not fail us.' 'Please, honored Sir, do not fail us, as we are very anxious to see you, and the business cannot be postponed. We beg to remain, honored Sir,

"Your humble and obedient
servants,
"Thomas Traddles,
"David Copperfield,
"James Steerforth,

Tommy: (*taking the letter and refolding it with much care*) Steerforth signed it for us all, you know.

David: That letter is all right. Don't you think so, Tommy?

Tommy: I think that is a good letter.

David: You'd better put it in the post right off. Today is Wednesday, and—

Tommy: (*looking away off*) There's Tom Gradgrind! I'll bet he's looking for us! (*calls*) Tom! Oh Tom!—Hello, Tom!

Dovid: (*looking in the same direction*) O Tom! Tom Gradgrind! Whistle to him, Tommy.

Tommy: (*whistles and whistles*) He's going the other way! (*he dashes out.*)

David: (*calling after him*) Are you coming back here?

Tommy: (*from distance*) No. Come on!

David: I'm coming! (*starts on a run*)

Curtain.

(*Greenfields Schoolhouse, Friday afternoon, June 9th,* 1871. *Several plain, dark-wood chairs, and a plain, dark table on which are a few big books. The door opens and in come Little Nell and Little Em'ly, wearing straw hats, shoulder shawls, and carrying little baskets.*)

Nell: It's a good thing the door was not locked. (*takes off her hat and shawl*) What would we have done if it had been locked?

Em'ly: The boys said they would climb in the window if it was. Tommy Traddles says he doesn't mind climbing in windows.

Nell: We are the first ones here. (*looks around the room slowly*) I think it would be lots nicer to have the party outside, don't you?

Em'ly: We can go out under the trees right after we eat, you know. It wouldn't be a party party if we had the refreshments outside.

Nell: No, that is so. (*arranges their hats and shawls carefully on a chair*) We might get the table fixed. Where do you think it ought to be?

Em'ly: Let's wait until Florence comes. She will know what to do; they have such beautiful things at their house. Her father buys her everything she wants.

Nell: (*lifting a big book from the table*) But her mother is dead.

Em'ly: Yes, her mother is dead. (*she carries a book to the corner, where they are stacking them on the floor*) It is a good thing that she is coming. She will bring such nice things to eat.

Nell: (*lifting a book*) I couldn't bring much,—just bread and cheese and ginger cake. Do you think it will be all right?

Em'ly: (*dusting the table*) Of course it will. We want some of everything, and I couldn't bring any cheese. I wish the others would

come. Maybe they're waiting to come with The Master.

(*Enter Florence Dombey, with two napkin-covered baskets.*)

Florence: Is this where the party is to be?

Nell: How do you do, Florence? Yes, this is the right place. Where is Paul? Put your hat here with ours.

Florence: (*taking off her pretty hat*) I thought I would be the first one here. Paul has a headache, and Papa wouldn't let him come, but he sent his basket.

Nell: That is nice. It is too bad he couldn't come. Where is Ham, Em'ly? The Master will want to see him, *sure*.

Em'ly: Ham is so afraid of company I couldn't get him to come. He put something in the basket, though.

Florence: Hadn't we better fix the table?

(*There is a murmur of voices outside the open door.*)

Em'ly: Listen! It's Agnes and David!

(*Enter Agnes Wickfield and David Copperfield.*)

David: Has The Master come? Where is Traddles? How did you get in?

Nell: (*taking Agnes's hat*) What did you bring, Agnes?

Florence: No, The Master has not come yet. What time did Tommy write him to come?

David: At 3 o'clock. Where are you going to have the party? Isn't Steerforth here yet? What shall I do with this? (*holding out Agnes's basket.*)

Em'ly: Give it to me. What did you bring, Agnes?

Agnes: (*taking the basket from Em'ly, and taking therefrom a little white apron*) Some sandwiches and cake, and—

David: And grapes. I brought the grapes.

Agnes: (*tying on her apron*) We must get ready

for the party. David, you go to the spring and get us some water, please.

David: What shall I carry it in?

Florence: Oh, I forgot; I have an apron, too. (*gets it from her basket*) Didn't anybody bring a pitcher?

Agnes: (*to David*) Bring it in the gourd. It holds a good deal. (*David goes; the girls unpack their baskets, and arrange the refreshments.*)

Florence: This is Paul's basket. I don't know what he put into it. He wouldn't let me see.

Agnes: Isn't Paul coming? Let's spread the napkins for a table cloth.

Nell: We ought to have some flowers, I think.

Florence: Oh look, look, Paul has put in a letter for The Master! (*holds up a little envelope*)

Em'ly: (*going to her*) What does it read?

Florence: It is sealed, but on the outside it says, "For The Dear Master." Poor Paul, he wanted to come so much!

Agnes: It is too bad, but we can tell him all about it.

Em'ly: Yes, and let's take him some of the refreshments.

(*Pip appears at the open door.*)

Pip: (*standing in the door*) Is this where the party is to be?

Nell: Yes, Pip dear, come right in. The party is almost ready.

Pip: (*advancing into the room, and slowly forcing a big red apple from his pocket*) I brought this. Joe hooked it for me last night.

Agnes: (*taking the apple*) Thank you, Pip. We'll put it right in the middle of the table, and eat it for dessert.

Pip: (*standing on tiptoe to survey the table*) My, that looks good!

(*Re-enter David, quite out of breath.*)

David: There isn't any gourd at the spring. It's gone. Hello, Pip! Tommy Traddles and Oliver Twist are coming!

Pip: (*not turning from the table, but turning his eyes in David's direction*) How do you know they are?

David: I saw them 'way down the road.

Agnes: What shall we do for water?

Pip: We can all go to the spring and take a dwink. That's the way Joe and I do. Cake makes you awfully fristy!

David: Yes, we can do that.

Nell: We are all going to take a walk afterwards, and we can go by the spring.

Florence: There, everything is ready. How do you think it looks?

David: (*contemplates the spread*) They are very nice refreshments, I think.

Pip: I frink it looks very good, don't you, Em'ly?

A Voice: (*from outside*) Hello! Is this Greenfields Schoolhouse?

David: That's Tommy Traddles' voice! (*goes to the door*) Come on in, Traddles!

Pip. (*turning from the table with a sigh*) Yes, here we are, and the party is all ready.

(*Enter Tommy Traddles and Oliver Twist*)

David: Hello, Oliver Twist, how are you?

Oliver: (*takes off his ragged cap*) I couldn't bring anything. I—I didn't have anything.

Agnes: (*taking his cap*) That's all right, Oliver Twist. We are glad to see you. We have enough, anyway.

Tommy: (*to David*) Did you see Sissy Jupe? (*he and David consult apart.*)

Pip: (*anxiously surveying the table*) Do you think there'll be enough cake?

Em'ly: Yes, a slice apiece is enough, and then there are some little cakes, too.

Pip: (*shaking his head doubtfully*) You'd better count the pieces.

Oliver: I won't eat any, 'cause—'cause I didn't bring any.

Nell: (*shaking her head at Pip*) I brought enough for you, Oliver Twist. You know I promised I would.

Tommy: (*coming forward*) This is all I could find. (*takes five small biscuits from five separate pockets*) And they aren't buttered!

Em'ly: There are twelve pieces of cake, Pip, so you see there are plenty.

Florence: If we only had a bouquet for the table!

Tommy: I'll go buy one. I have sixpence.

Nell: (*with hesitation*) I do not think The Master would like us to *buy* flowers.

Oliver: (*eagerly*) Do you think he likes meadow flowers best?

Nell: Yes, I am sure he does.

Oliver: Let me go pick some, because I couldn't bring anything, you know.

(*There is a knock on the panel of the open door, and, startled, they all turn to see the Dominie standing there.*)

David: Oh, I thought it was Steerforth!

Tommy: I thought it was Tom Gradgrind!

Florence: (*stepping toward the Dominie, and making a little courtesy*) How do you do, Sir?

Nell: Won't you come in, Sir? (*the Dominie comes forward, taking off his broad black hat as he does so.*)

Dominie: (*looking about in astonishment*) Why, what's all this? What's all this? (*the children gaze at him in silence*) Children, what's all this mean?

David: We're having a party.

Dominie: Well I should say you were! I should say you were!

Tommy: Do you mind, Sir, our having a birthday party here?

Dominie: No indeed; not in the least. But who are you all? (*There is a silence; the children gaze at him in puzzled suspense*) Where did you all come from? And how did you get in here?

Florence: (*timidly*) You aren't angry, are you, Sir?

Dominie: Angry? Why, certainly not. Certainly not. I am the Dominie of Greenfields, and I only stopped to get some books. You may have all the party here you want to. But I must know your names. (*Silence. Pip looks from the Dominie to the table, from the table to the Dominie.*) Won't you tell me your names? And maybe invite me to your party? I am not too old for a party, am I? (*the children consult apart.*)

David: (*coming forward with timid formality*) Please, Sir, we are Charles Dickens's children.

Dominie: (*smiling*) What, the famous Charles Dickens,—the *great* Charles Dickens?

David: Yes, Sir.

Tommy: (*nodding with much vigor, and running his hands through his hair*) We are the *great* Charles Dickens's children.

Dominie: (*seating himself*) Oh, I see, I see. And you're having a Dickens party is that it?

Children: (*in a relieved chorus*) Yes! Yes, Sir!

Dominie: Well, then I am glad I happened to come. I love Charles Dickens, too. (*to Little Em'ly*) And whom do you represent, my dear?

Em'ly: I am Little Em'ly.

Dominie: "Little Em'ly." (*strokes her bright hair*) Then where is "Master Davy" and Peggotty and—

David: Here I am.

Dominie: Are you "Master Davy"?

David: I am David Copperfield, Sir.

Pip: (*pressing up to the Dominie*) I am Pip.

Oliver: And I am Oliver Twist.

Dominie: (*rising to shake hands with the boys*) This is delightful. I have heard a good deal about you boys.

Nell: And please, Sir, I am Little Nell, and this is Florence Dombey.

David: (*taking Agnes by the hand*) And this is Agnes Wickfield.

Dominie: I am very glad to meet you both. And this is Paul's sister! (*to Florence*) Where is Paul? I should so much like to see him. (*he reseats himself*).

Florence: Paul had a headache today, so he did not come to the party. (*The Dominie looks at her as if a little surprised.*)

Dominie: (*to Tommy Traddles*) You represent Tommy Traddles, don't you?

Tommy: What do you mean?

Dominie: You are playing Tommy Traddles, aren't you? The boy who was always getting thrashed, and then drawing skeletons?

Tommy: (*standing very erect*) You mean I am *pretending?*

Dominie: Yes, playing you are Tommy Traddles, you know.

Tommy: (*running his fingers through his hair, excitedly*) I am not playing anybody. I am Thomas Traddles, Esquire.

Dominie: (*looking at him intently*) Dear me, I beg your pardon. (*slowly*) I beg your pardon. I thought you were playing you were—were Charles Dickens's children.

David: (*stepping bravely to Tommy's side*) No, Sir, we are not playing. We are Charles Dickens's children, and we have got up this party for him. He will be here pretty soon. It is his birthday, you see.

Dominie: His birthday? *Today?*

David: Yes, sir, and we are his children, and this party is for him.

Dominie: (*after a long, long pause*) Excuse me, little David. . . . I think I understand now. I thought it was a play, but I see I was mistaken. You are Charles Dickens's children.

Children: (*joyously*) Yes, Sir! Yes, Sir!

Nell: And this is a surprise party for him.

Agnes: We are waiting for him to come.

Pip: Yes, and we have lots and lots of cake, and grapes, and—and ev'ryfring!

Dominie: Does he know you are waiting?

David: Yes, Sir, we wrote him where the party would be; he can't miss it. This is Greenfields Schoolhouse, isn't it?

Dominie: Yes.

Nell: (*busy at the table*) He will be here pretty soon.

David: We didn't tell him it was a party. We just wrote we wanted to see him on particular and pressing business.

Dominie: Where did you address the letter?

David: Tommy wrote it. Tell him where, Tommy.

Tommy: (*embarrassed, but business-like*) Why, Sir, to Charles Dickens, Esquire, Gadshill, Kent.

David: It is a beautiful house, Sir. I heard a man talking about it once.

Dominie: Who told you he lived in Kent?

Tommy: Why, Steerforth said so.

Dominie: And who told you it was—is—his birthday?

David: Steerforth.

Dominie: Who told Steerforth?

David: Nobody told Steerforth. He doesn't have to be told things.

Dominie: (*shaking his head doubtfully*) Did he write you?

Tommy & David: Who? Steerforth?

Dominie: No, Charles Dickens, The Master.

Tommy: No Sir, but we know he'll come.

Pip: (*steals a piece of cake with secret haste*) But he is very busy writing books. It takes a long time to frink up a book. (*The Dominie puts his arm about Pip, who leans against him contentedly, munching his cake.*)

Agnes: (*taking off her apron*) Everything is ready now.

Florence: It is getting late. I wish he would come.

Em'ly: Do you suppose he will come in a fine carriage?

Agnes: I think we had better cover the cake, don't you? (*The girls consult apart, hovering about the table anxiously.*)

Dominie: If I were you I would not wait for him.

David: But it is his birthday, you see.

Pip: (*wiping his mouth on a small blue handkerchief*) The cake is very good. I hope he likes chocolate cake.

Em'ly: It is getting late. Let's go look for him, Little Nell. (*They go out the door.*)

David: If he doesn't come today he will tomorrow. We could have the party then.

Pip: But the cake will not be so good tomorrow.

Oliver: Maybe he is helping some poor children, and cannot come.

Dominie: If I were you I would not wait any longer.

Florence: (*coming close to the Dominie*) Why do you say that, Sir? Do you want to use the schoolhouse?

Dominie: No, my dear, I only came for some books. There is no school now.

David: That's why we had the party here, Sir. We thought it would be a good place.

Tommy: Yes, that's the reason.

(*Re-enter Little Nell and Little Em'ly.*)

Nell: We cannot see him anywheres on the road.

Dominie: (*very gravely and gently*) I do not think The Master will come today.

Oliver: (*shaking his head earnestly*) You do not?

Dominie: He *cannot* come today.

Oliver: Is he sick?

David: (*pressing close to the Dominie's side*) Is his mother dead?

Dominie: No, he—he is not sick. (*The children press around him, eager and awed.*)

Agnes: (*looking at David sorrowfully*) Did he tell you he wouldn't be here, Sir?

Dominie: No, I. . . . I have not seen him for a long time.

Tommy: He will come if he is not sick. I wrote him it was particular business.

Pip: (*nodding*) Yes. We tole him it was 'ticular business.

Em'ly: I *know* he will come.

Oliver: Yes, for it is his birthday, and there is frosted cake.

Dominie: (*solemnly*) The Master cannot come today, children. He—he is dead. This is the anniversary of his death, not his birthday. (*There is a wide-eyed silence.*)

Pip: (*wonderingly*) Is he dead?

Oliver: My mother is dead, too.

David: So is mine. (*There is another silence, the children looking thoughtfully at the Dominie.*)

Tommy: That is why he did not answer our letter.

Dominie: Yes, that is why.

Tommy: Steerforth ought to have told us.

David: I suppose he died since Steerforth saw him.

Dominie: (*caressing Pip's hand*) Yes, I think Steerforth does not know he is dead.

Florence: If you please, Sir, when did he die?

Dominie: A year ago today.

Tommy: (*after a silence*) I suppose Steerforth got it mixed.

Nell: How about the party now?

Pip: Why, there won't be any party; not if he cannot come.

Dominie: But The Master would want you to have the party just the same.

Em'ly: (*shaking her head*) I couldn't eat any cake—not now.

Oliver: No, we couldn't eat the—the refreshments now.

David: No, we onghtn't to have the party if The Master is dead.

Agnes: What shall we do with the cake?

Dominie: I know what Charles Dickens would like to have you do with it. I know as well as if he had told me.

Nell: What is it?

Dominie: Give it to the poor children you know,—the children who never have any cake on their birthdays. That is what he would tell you to do with it, for he was very good to the poor. He never forgot them, and he was never too busy to help them.

Nell: Yes, yes, let's give it to the poor. I'll pack the cake. (*gets the baskets.*)

Florence: And these grapes—(*the girls pack the food away in their baskets.*)

Agnes: (*tying on her apron again*) Let's put some of everything in each basket.

Em'ly: Oh yes, some of every single thing!

Pip: And cut up my apple, and put it in.

Tommy: (*going to the table*) And my biscuit. I wish they were buttered now!

Nell: Yes, for his birthday—oh, I forgot! (*turning to the Dominie*) Can't we play it's his birthday, just the same?

Dominie: Yes, Little Nell, just the same . . . just the same! And while you girls are fixing the baskets, suppose you boys come out on the playground and let me tell you about The Master?

Tommy: (*getting his hat*) I'll go get out the bench,

—it's behind the schoolhouse. Come on, Oliver. (*He and Oliver hurry out of the room.*)

David: Will you tell us about when he died? Like Peggotty told me about Mamma?

Pip: (*sliding down from the Dominie's knee*) And about when he was a little boy?

Dominie: (*getting up from his chair*) Yes, everything. David and I can tell you a whole lot about him. (*Walks toward the door, one arm about David's shoulder, the other hand holding Pip's.*)

David: I never saw him, Sir, but I imagine—oh, so many things about him! And sometimes I dream about him—I do indeed, Sir!

Dominie: Yes, David, and he dreamed of you all his life . . . all his life! You really know him better than any of us. You knew him very well indeed when he was a little boy.

David: (*shaking his head sadly*) No, I just imagine things about him. I never saw him, Sir.

Dominie: Well, come on, and I'll tell you about him. You little girls will come out pretty soon?

Florence: Yes, Sir, when the baskets are ready. Will you help us carry them around to the poor children?

Dominie: Yes, we'll all take them around. (*He goes out of the door with the two boys.*)

Florence: My baskets are ready. (*She puts on her hat, and takes up her baskets.*)

Em'ly: Are we going to give them the baskets, too?

Nell: Oh let's, because it is his birthday!

Em'ly: If they were only prettier—only trimmed with something! I could have brought some sea shells,—lovely little pink ones! (*ties her hat under her chin, and takes up her basket*) I wish Ham had come; he'd like to hear about The Master. Come on;

I want to hear the commencing. (*goes.*)

Agnes: (*taking off her apron*) Is everything all right? (*looks around the room*) We ought to put the books back, I think. The Dominie will look for them on the table.

Florence: Yes, I think we ought. (*They replace the books on the table.*)

Agnes: I want to hear what the Dominie is saying. He has commenced to tell about The Master.

Florence: I am ready. (*She and Agnes start to go.*)

Nell: I'll be there right away. Go on. (*The girls go*) Grandfather would have told me about The Master's death if he had known it. (*straightens the books on the table and places the chairs at the table.*) It was going to be such a nice party! . . . Of course he could not answer Tommy's letter if he was not—not here. But maybe he knows about it; Grandfather says the dead do not forget us. There, I guess everything is all right. (*she goes out.*)

Curtain.

(The playground of Greenfields Schoolhouse, Friday afternoon. The Dominie is seated on a wooden bench, Pip on one side of him, David Copperfield on the other. The rest of the children are grouped about, the girls with their baskets.)

Dominie: (*concluding his story*) And so, after all, you see, the sad little boy grew into a great and good and wise man, and wrote books that make people wiser and happier.

Pip: (*reflectively*) I didn't know he was so poor. Why, he was poor as me!

Pip: (*looking up at the Dominie*) But he wasn't afraid, was he?

Dominie: No, he was always a brave little fellow. But once he got very much discouraged. It was when he was working at Murdstone and Quinby's warehouse, down in Blackfriars. (*David sits more erect, and looks at the Dominie intently.*) He was only nine years old, and—

Pip: (*straightening up with a sense of importance*) I am nine years old. Was he as big as me?

Oliver: I am eleven years old.

Dominie: How old are you, David?

David: I am nearly eleven, but I remember when I was nine.

Oliver: So do I.

Pip: (*sinking back against the Dominie with a sigh of completeness*) I don't have to 'member, 'cause I am nine now.

Florence: Please tell us about the time he got so discouraged.

Dominie: (*patting David's hand as he continues*) Well, you see his father and mother were so poor that Charles had to stop school and go to work. And at Murdstone and Quinby's they put him to wrapping up bottles and pasting labels on them.

(*David continues to gaze steadfastly at the Dominie.*)

Oliver: What was in the bottles?

Dominie: Blacking,—shoe blacking.

David: Please, Sir, I think you are mistaken. They were empty bottles.

Oliver: (*to David*) What would they do with *empty* bottles?

David: They had had wine in them, but the boys had to wash them—rinse them, you know. (*to the Dominie, earnestly*) Indeed, Sir, the bottles were empty.

Dominie: Thank you, David, for putting me right. I remember now; they were empty wine bottles. Well, he had to work all day long, from morning to night.

Nell: Was the work too hard for him?

Dominie: No, it wasn't hard; washing bottles is not hard work, but he thought he would never be able to go to school again, and never be anybody. (*David, watching him intensely, wags his head slowly.*) He thought he would have to stay there as long as he lived—forever and ever. You see, he felt that the work was degrading, and he was very, very unhappy. I do not suppose the whole city of London held a sadder-hearted little boy. (*There is a moment's sympathetic silence*) And there were a good many sad-hearted boys in London, too.

Oliver: I know how he felt. And sometimes he—he imagined how it would be when he was an old, old man, washing bottles. (*The Dominie nods once or twice with entire understanding.*)

David: (*slowly*) I wonder if he knew "Mealy Potatoes?"

Dominie: (*gently*) Yes, David, I think he did. Why do you ask?

David: Why, Mealy Potatoes worked there when —when I did.

Dominie: (*gravely*) When you worked where?

David: (*looking straight ahead, and speaking slowly*) At Murdstone and Quinby's, Sir, down in Blackfriars. I worked there, like Charles Dickens did when he was a little boy.

Tommy: Didn't you like it, either?

David: No, I did not like it. (*There is another silence, the children looking at the Dominie, David looking down.*)

Agnes: But when you found your Aunt, David, you were all right then.

David: Yes, I was all right then.

(*Enter the Marchioness, in long apron and frilled cap.*)

March.: (*puffing a little*) Is this the party I am 'vited to?

Florence: (*getting up and going to her*) Yes. You are the Marchioness, aren't you?

March.: Mr. Liverer said there was to be a party here, and he 'vited me. I runned all the way.

Nell: This is the party. Come sit by me.

March.: I come right as soon's I could. It seemed like Miss Sally would never get out of the kitching!

Pip: (*peeping around the Dominie's shoulder*) We are going to give the cake to the poor children, yon know.

March.: Mr. Liverer is going to come for me, and he said I could stay an hour. I whist I wasn't late.

Dominie: Please be seated, Marchioness, and we will explain to you why there is no party.

Em'ly: I think this is a lovely party.

Pip: No *eating* party, he means, Em'ly. (*Florence and the Marchioness talk apart.*)

Dominie: And I have thought of a good way to cele-

brate The Master's birthday,—a better way than "an eating party," as Pip calls it.

Pip: I think eating parties are the nicest kind, don't you, Tommy?

Tommy: Maybe the Dominie knows a nicer kind. (*to the Dominie*) What kind do you mean, Sir?

Dominie: I've been thinking that we ought to do something in remembrance of him today. You know it is really a more sacred day, even, than his birthday.

Nell: Oh, I wish we could do something—keep it in some real *good* way!

Dominie: Do you all wish we could?

Oliver: Of course we do.

Tommy: That's why we got up this party.

Pip: (*glancing at the baskets*) In course.

Dominie: In the schoolhouse I have a little picture of Charles Dickens in a frame; I bought it only the other day to hang on the wall. Suppose we fix the picture out here and all gather flowers and decorate it?

Agnes: Where will you put the picture?

Em'ly: I think he would like that. I am going to get only red flowers. He liked them best.

Oliver: (*springing up*) Oh, I tell you what! Put the picture on the bench, right in the center, and we can put the flowers all around it.

Nell: That is a good way. (*to the Dominie*) Don't you think so, Sir?

Dominie: (*glancing anxiously at David*) An excellent way.

Pip: (*sliding off the bench*) Let's all go now, while he is getting the pitcher.

Tommy: (*getting up from the grass*) How long can we have? (*Florence and the Marchioness come forward.*)

Florence: I have told the Marchioness why The Master isn't here. And she says Sissy Jupe is

coming; she told her she was coming sure.

Pip: (*all attention instantly*) Is she going to bring Merrylegs?

March.: I don't know as she durst. But she's coming sure, she said.

Dominie: Who is 'Merrylegs?' I thought I knew all Charles Dickens's children?

Pip: (*cutting a caper*) He is Sissy Jupe's father's dog, and he does tricks in a circus,—in Sissy Jupe's father's circus, I guess.

Florence: No, it is not Mr. Jupe's circus. (*to the Dominie*) Sissy's father is a clown, Sir, in Mr. Sleary's circus.

Dominie: Oh, I remember now. I remember now. Sissy was adopted by Mr. Gradgrind, Tom's father, wasn't she? I remember all about her now.

Florence: Yes, Sir.

Pip: (*prancing joyously about*) I am going to meet Sissy! (*starts out*)

Dominie: (*rising*) Now, listen, everybody. (*takes a silver whistle from his pocket*) See this whistle? (*he blows it*) Now, when you hear that, come right back and bring your flowers.

Children: (*all but David, who watches all this remotely*) Yes, Sir!

Pip: Come *right* back? Do not stop to get *any* more?

Dominie: Come right back. I will give you half an hour, (*he looks at his watch*) and everybody must get to work. We want lots and lots of flowers.

Pip: (*dancing about*) Lots and lots of f'owers!

Em'ly: (*taking Pip by the hand*) May n't we go meet Sissy, Sir?

Dominie: Yes, but gather all the flowers you can.

Tommy: (*starting*) What if we do not hear the whistle?

Dominie: I'll blow it so you can, though of course you must not go far.

Tommy: Come on, Oliver Twist. (*He pauses, looks at David, who doesn't know it, then turns irresolutely to Oliver*) Come on. (*They go.*)

March.: (*eating one of the sandwiches Agnes has given her*) Am I to gather flowers, too?

Dominie: (*glancing at David, then half turning to go*) Certainly, Marchioness, all the pretty ones you can find. Bring your apron full.

Agnes: (*replacing her basket under the bench*) I'll show you, Marchioness.

Nell: Put your basket with mine, Florence.

Florence: (*to the Marchioness*) So will I. (*puts her basket under the bench*) Let's hurry. I wish Paul were here. He's always talking about gathering flowers. (*The four girls go out. The Dominie turns, looks at David, who doesn't notice him, then goes out. In a minute he returns with a small framed picture of Dickens, and a big book. He steps up to the bench, behind David, and stands there, looking down at him.*)

Dominie: Well, David, aren't you going to get any flowers?

David: (*stirring a little, but not looking around*) Yes, Sir, but I want to ask you something.

Dominie: What is it?

David: Charles Dickens was very unhappy at Murdstone and Quinby's, wasn't he?

Dominie: Yes, David.

David: It almost broke his heart to work there, didn't it?

Dominie: Yes, David.

David: (*looking up*) Well, Sir, what I wanted to know is, was his mother dead when he was working there?

Dominie: No, David, his mother was living at that time.

David: (*after a pause*) I am glad. My mother was dead when I worked there.

Dominie: Yes, David.

David: (*getting up from the bench*) Which way did Tommy go?

Dominie: (*indicating*) They are all in that field yonder.

David: All right. (*he goes slowly*)

Dominie: (*looking after him*) "I have in my heart of hearts a favorite child. And his name is David Copperfield." (*He walks slowly around in front of the bench, places the picture in an upright position, propped up by the book. As he finishes doing so, in comes Florence Dombey.*)

Florence: We girls have thought of something, Sir, and I came back to ask you.

Dominie: What is that, Florence?

Florence: Don't you think it would be nice, Sir, to drape the picture in white? We think it would.

Dominie: I think so, too, but I haven't anything white but my handkerchief, (*he takes it out*), and it isn't very white.

Florence: We thought our aprons would do, Sir. They are clean and soft.

Dominie: By all means, Florence, by all means. That is a beautiful idea.

Florence: (*taking two aprons from their respective baskets*) We thought the white would look pretty with the flowers. They are getting lots of flowers.

Dominie: (*taking an apron*) I am afraid I cannot help you; all my fingers would be thumbs.

Florence: (*kneeling on the bench, and tucking the aprons about the picture in tiny folds*) I can fix them, I think. We girls decided exactly how they ought to be.

Dominie: (*presently*) It is going to look very pretty . . . . Where did you learn to do that?

Florence: I didn't learn. Girls just know things like this.

Dominie: (*watching her thoughtfully*) Yes, Florence, I think they do.

Florence: (*rising to her feet*) Is that all right?

Dominie: That is beautiful.

Florence: Is the time almost up? (*turns to go*)

Dominie: I will walk a little way with you, then blow the whistle. It is time the party was over. (*they go out together.*)

EPILOGUE. A PANTOMIME.

For the Master.

Enter Sissy Jupe and Little Em'ly, who place flowers on the bench, and linger about it lovingly. As they go out, Tommy Traddles comes with a small bunch, which he places into position *very* close to the picture. Then Pip and Oliver Twist, Pip proudly carrying the flowers and scattering them with much precission over the seat of the bench. Then, singly, and each retiring slowly when the task is done, the Marchioness, Agnes (with her hands full of trailing vines), and Little Nell. Lastly, David, who puts his flowers next to Tommy's, stands a minute sorrowfully contemplating The Master, then falls on his knees, his clasped hands extended toward the picture.

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